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UNITED NATIONS OBSERVER GROUP IN CENTRAL AMERICA

Report of the Secretary-General

1. On 5 November 1990 the Security Council adopted resolution 675 (1990), the operative paragraphs of which read as follows:

> "1. Approves the report of the Secretary-General contained in document S/21909;
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> "2. Decides to extend, under its authority, the mandate of the United Nations Observer Group in Central America (ONUCA) as defined in resolution 644 (1989), for a further period of six months, that is until 7 May 1991, bearing in mind the report of the Secretary-General contained in document S/21909 and the need to continue to monitor expenditures carefully during this period of increasing demands on peace-keeping resources;
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> "3. Requests the Secretary-General to keep the Security Council fully informed of further developments and to report on all aspects of the operations of the Observer Group before the expiry of the new mandate period."

2. The present report is submitted in response to the request made by the Security Council in paragraph 3 of resolution 675 (1990). It contains an account of ONUCA's organization and operational activities during the period from 27 October 1990 to 29 April 1991, together with my conclusions and recommendations concerning ONUCA's future. My recommendations take into account developments in the region over the past six months as well as experience gained in the execution of ONUCA's mandate up to the present time.

Command, composition and deployment

3. As I informed the Security Council in my report dated 26 October 1990 (S/21909, para. 35), it was my intention to reduce the level of command of

ONUCA from Major-General to Brigadier-General as a consequence of the proposals for reductions in ONUCA's strength set out in paragraph 34 of the same report. Following the Council's approval of my recommendations, the necessary retrenchment was completed by the middle of December 1990 and the Chief Military Observer, Major-General Agustín Quesada Gómez, relinquished his command on 20 December 1990. Since that date and pending the appointment of a successor, the Deputy Chief Military Observer, Brigadier-General Lewis MacKenzie (Canada), has been exercising the command of ONUCA as Chief Military Observer a.i. In accordance with my letter of 22 April 1991 to the President of the Security Council (S/22527) and the President's reply of 24 April 1991 (S/22528), I am taking steps to appoint Brigadier-General Victor Suanzes Pardo (Spain) as Chief Military Observer with effect from 13 May 1991, subject to the extension of ONUCA's mandate.

4. As of April 1991, the military strength of ONUCA was 187, as follows:

United Nations military observers	
Argentina	1
Brazil	14
Canada	29
Colombia	8
Ecuador	12
India	12
Ireland	19
Spain	37
Sweden	12
Venezuela	14
Subtotal	158
Naval squadron	
Argentina	29
Total	187

In addition to the above, five civilian medical officers, five medical assistants and four pilots provided by Germany are currently assisting ONUCA in its mission.

5. Sixty-five international and 82 locally recruited civilian staff members were serving with ONUCA by late April 1991. The total of 147 was some 20 per cent less than in October 1990, when it had been 183. In addition there are 21 civilian aircrew and maintenance personnel for 6 helicopters chartered from a commercial firm.

6. From November 1990 until January 1991 16 military observers were temporarily detached from ONUCA to serve as security observers in the United Nations Election Verification Mission in Haiti (ONUVEH). In addition three members of ONUCA's civilian support staff served in ONUVEH for varying periods of time. Also 30 overland vehicles were lent by ONUCA to ONUVEH for approximately 4 months.

7. The table below and the annexed map show the current deployment of ONUCA, whose headquarters remains at Tegucigalpa. This deployment reflects the recommendations in my report of 26 October 1990 (S/21909).

	Liaison offices	Verification centres	Operational patrol posts
Costa Rica	San José		
El Salvador	San Salvador	San Miguel	
Guatemala	Guatemala City	Esquipulas Jutiapa	
Honduras	Tegucigalpa	Choluteca Sta. Rosa de Copán San Lorenzo*	La Esperanza La Guarita
Nicaragua	Managua	Chinandega Estelí	Potosí Ocotal

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* The naval verification centre (NVC) is responsible for patrolling throughout the Gulf of Fonseca and the adjacent territorial waters of the littoral countries and reports directly to ONUCA headquarters.

Operations

8. In my report of 26 October 1990 (S/21909), I proposed the closure of some of ONUCA's verification centres and a reduction of some 40 per cent in its military strength following the termination of hostilities in Nicaragua in the first half of 1990. At the same time I confirmed that I was convinced of the continuing validity of ONUCA's mandate, as defined by the Security Council in its resolution 644 (1989) of 7 November 1989. This mandate entrusts ONUCA with

responsibility for verifying compliance by the five Central American Governments with the security undertakings in the Esquipulas II Accords concerning the cessation of aid to irregular forces and insurrectionist movements active in the region and the prevention of the use of the territory of one State for attacks on any of the other States. ONUCA has accordingly continued, in its new and smaller configuration, to patrol sensitive border zones where violations of the Esquipulas undertakings are most likely to occur.

9. Although patrolling by land declined from a total of some 450,000 kilometres in the period May-November 1990 to just over 250,000 kilometres in the past six months, that patrolling has been focused on a smaller area than before. Its intensity in the border zones where it is now concentrated has been maintained at the earlier level and in some cases increased. Conversely, and notwithstanding the reduction of the helicopter wing from 12 to 6 aircraft, patrolling by helicopter increased from 570 hours in the period May-October 1990 to more than 700 hours during the past 6 months. During the same period the naval unit in San Lorenzo carried out over 1,800 hours of patrolling, including more than 750 hours of night patrols, and covered 17,000 nautical miles.

10. In spite of this intensity of patrolling on land, in the air and at sea, ONUCA did not observe directly any specific violation of the security undertakings. It noted, however, that the presence of national army and security personnel in some sensitive border areas did not always appear to be sufficient to enable the Governments concerned to comply with those undertakings. Indeed, during the past six months, ONUCA observers have discerned a tendency to reduce the presence of national army and security forces in certain areas where violations of the undertakings might have occurred in the past and might still be taking place. In some areas, national officials and local residents have told ONUCA of cross-border traffic of an undetermined nature by armed persons. ONUCA has encountered no direct evidence, however, that these movements are such as to constitute violations of the undertakings. Instead, ONUCA has often been told by national authorities that such incidents are essentially of a criminal character.

11. The NVC in San Lorenzo, Honduras, continues to patrol the Gulf of Fonseca and adjacent waters in the Pacific Ocean. Whereas patrolling was initially limited to daylight hours, night patrols were introduced in the last quarter of 1990 and now account for more than one third of the total. As a further refinement, joint patrolling with helicopters was initiated in October 1990. Since then more than 30 joint patrols, involving over 50 helicopter flying hours, have been carried out. From helicopters working in coordination with the NVC, ONUCA observers help to guide fast patrol boats to vessels that seem to warrant ONUCA's attention. The database that is being compiled by the NVC enables ONUCA to identify divergences from established patterns of traffic that could suggest possible violations of the Esquipulas II undertakings.

12. As of 1 December 1990, the helicopter component of ONUCA's air wing was halved from 12 to 6, leaving the air wing with a strength of 1 fixed-wing aircraft and 6 helicopters. All ONUCA helicopters are now chartered from

commercial firms, following the repatriation of the Canadian helicopter squadron and its eight helicopters in December 1990. During the past 6 months, the fixed-wing aircraft contributed by Germany has flown more than 500 hours, including medical evacuations and special flights, while helicopter flying time totalled 2,000 hours, including medical evacuations and special flights in support of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Support and Verification Commission (CIAV). ONUCA helicopters were twice hit by small-arms fire from the ground, which perforated one of their rotor blades. In one case, a suspect was arrested and he later pleaded guilty; in the second, the origin of the fire could not be determined.

13. The ONUCA medical team, consisting of five doctors and five medical assistants, continued to provide routine and emergency medical care for ONUCA personnel, in addition to preventive medicine, vaccinations and first-aid training. It also helped the Honduran health authorities in the vaccination and feeding of children in otherwise inaccessible areas. Further, at the request of the Government of Costa Rica, six members of the ONUCA medical team were dispatched to that country on 23 April 1991 to provide emergency medical services to the victims of the earthquake that struck the eastern sectors of Costa Rica and Panama on 22 April. Four of ONUCA's helicopters also participated in rescue and disaster relief operations in Costa Rica immediately after the earthquake.

14. During the period covered by the present report, ONUCA received three requests to investigate alleged violations of the Esquipulas II undertakings. The first of these was received on 7 January 1991 from the Government of El Salvador, which asked ONUCA to investigate the origin of SAM-7 and SAM-14 ground-to-air missiles apparently used by the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN) in El Salvador, particularly in the Department of Usulután on 23 November 1990. The Government of Nicaragua extended its full cooperation to ONUCA and confirmed that the missiles in question had been illicitly removed from Nicaraguan army arsenals with the assistance of some army officers and had been handed over to FMLN in October 1990. As was subsequently reported in the press, 17 of these missiles were returned by FMLN to the Government of Nicaragua on 2 February 1991; a further 11 were said to have been fired by FMLN. The results of ONUCA's investigation were officially communicated to the Governments of El Salvador and Nicaragua in a report dated 8 March 1991.

15. On 15 January 1991 another request was received from the Government of El Salvador asking ONUCA to investigate, on the basis of a list of serial numbers appended to the request, the origin of a large number of weapons, mostly small arms, confiscated by the Salvadorian Army. ONUCA has not yet been in a position to act on this request, pending the receipt of clarification and additional details requested from the Government of El Salvador.

16. Thirdly, on 11 March 1991, following the interception by the Honduran Army of a truck loaded with arms and other war matériel near the Honduran-Nicaraguan border on 22 February 1991, the Honduran Government asked

ONUCA to investigate the origin of the matériel. In response, ONUCA obtained from the Government of Nicaragua information on the latter's own investigation, which indicated that the matériel might have been shipped illegally to Honduras with the assistance of Nicaraguan Army personnel. ONUCA's report on this matter, which will be completed as soon as additional information requested from the Nicaraguan authorities is received, will be made available to the Governments concerned, in accordance with established procedure.

17. ONUCA also lent its assistance on two occasions when hostilities took place on or near El Salvador's border with Honduras. In the morning hours of 12 December 1990 ONUCA was informed by observers manning the operational patrol post at La Guarita, which is close to that border, that some 200 members of the Salvadorian Army had sought refuge there following a confrontation with forces of FMLN on Salvadorian territory earlier the same day. Following consultation with the Honduran authorities, an ONUCA medical team was dispatched by helicopter to the scene in order to attend to a number of wounded Salvadorian soldiers. Later in the afternoon, and at the request of the Honduran authorities, 13 of the most seriously wounded Salvadorian soldiers were evacuated to Tegucigalpa in three ONUCA helicopters. The subsequent repatriation of the Salvadorian soldiers, including the wounded, was handled directly between the two Governments concerned, without ONUCA involvement.

18. In the early afternoon of 2 April 1991, ONUCA was informed by the Government of Honduras that a group of Salvadorian soldiers and customs officials had crossed into Honduran territory from the Salvadorian customs post at El Poy, following an attack by FMLN on that post several hours earlier. At the Government's request, a team composed of military observers from the verification centres at Santa Rosa de Copán and Esquipulas arrived at El Poy later in the afternoon. By that time the FMLN elements had withdrawn from the border posts and departed from El Poy. The team was shown two dead Salvadorian soldiers and extensive damage to the Salvadorian customs post.

19. As another essential activity in pursuance of its mandate, ONUCA continued to maintain close liaison at various levels with both the military and the civilian authorities in each of the five host countries. The Chief Military Observer was invited, in an observer capacity, to attend the meeting of the Central American Security Commission held at Managua on 12 and 13 April 1991. This meeting offered a valuable opportunity for an exchange of views on how ONUCA's contribution to the Central American peace process could be enhanced and on the recommendations adopted by the Security Commission at its previous meeting held at Tegucigalpa on 23 and 24 November 1990 (S/22057), which were subsequently endorsed by the five Central American Presidents at their summit meeting at Puntarenas from 15 to 17 December 1990 (S/22032).

Relations with the parties

20. ONUCA continued to enjoy excellent working relations with both the military and the civilian authorities in all five host countries. In general, ONUCA's contacts at all levels reflected a positive attitude on the part of the national authorities and a willingness to help to facilitate ONUCA's work to the extent possible. It is regretted, however, that so far only one of the countries has provided ONUCA with rent-free space for its office accommodation in accordance with the agreements concluded at the outset of the mission with each of the five Governments. Of the other four countries, one has made a partial contribution towards the rental of ONUCA offices there. But the remaining three countries have so far made no payment towards the rental of ONUCA premises. I have instructed the Chief Military Observer to pursue this matter with the Governments concerned, in accordance with the views repeatedly expressed by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) (see A/44/874, para. 20, and A/45/832, para. 25).

Financial aspects

21. By its resolution 45/247 of 21 December 1990, the General Assembly authorized the Secretary-General to enter into commitments for ONUCA at a rate not to exceed $2,730,000 gross ($2,633,000 net) per month, with the prior concurrence of ACABQ, for the period from 7 May to 7 November 1991, inclusive, should the Security Council decide to continue the Group beyond 7 May 1991. In the event that the Council so decides, the costs to the United Nations for maintaining ONUCA for a six-month extension period would be within the commitment authorized by the Assembly in its resolution 45/247.

22. At the beginning of April 1991, unpaid assessed contributions to the ONUCA Special Account for the mandate periods ending 7 May 1991 amounted to $7.5 million.

Observations

23. I remain convinced that ONUCA continues to make a valuable contribution to the peace process in Central America by providing an impartial mechanism for verifying that the five Central American Governments are complying with the security undertakings in the Esquipulas II Agreements. It is gratifying that the five Presidents themselves, in the joint declaration issued at the end of their summit at Puntarenas, Costa Rica, from 15 to 17 December 1990 (S/22032), expressed their full confidence in ONUCA. At the same time, it is important to re-emphasize the point made in paragraph 27 of my report of 26 October 1990 (S/21909), namely that ONUCA is not mandated, staffed or equipped to detect clandestine activities or to take physical action to prevent them. Those functions properly belong to the five Governments, which agreed at Esquipulas to cease aid to irregular forces and insurrectionist movements and to prevent the use of one State's territory for attacks on others.

24. During the course of the mandate period that is about to end, I instructed that a study be undertaken into the cost-effectiveness of ONUCA's current method of operation. The study was to take into account the relevant recommendations made to the Central American Presidents by their Security Commission at its meeting at Tegucigalpa on 23 and 24 November 1990 (S/22057). These recommendations were, inter alia, that further efforts should be exerted by all concerned to improve liaison and the exchange of information between ONUCA and the five Governments; that ONUCA should improve its communications systems and, if necessary, acquire additional equipment, such as modern communications and radar installations; and that ONUCA should increase its presence and verification activity along national boundaries in the region. The study was also to take into account the fact that, as reported in paragraph 10 above, ONUCA's extensive patrolling activities had not so far led to the detection of a single violation of the Esquipulas II undertakings. This raised the question of whether, bearing in mind the Security Council's reference in paragraph 2 of resolution 675 (1990) to "the need to continue to monitor expenditure carefully during this period of increasing demands on peace-keeping resources", such patrolling was cost-effective.

25. The study concluded that ONUCA should continue to maintain a regular and visible presence in those border areas where activities contrary to the Esquipulas II undertakings seemed most likely to occur and that patrolling was the best way of achieving such a presence, with the purposes described in paragraph 28 of my report of 26 October 1990 (S/21909). But it also concluded that the emphasis of ONUCA's presence in these border areas should be more directly focused on liaison and the exchange of information with the security authorities of the States concerned, in order to enable ONUCA to verify that those States were taking the action necessary to enable them to comply with their commitments under Esquipulas II.

26. The Chief Military Observer a.i. has recommended that ONUCA's method of operations should be modified accordingly. This will be consistent with the first of the recommendations of the Central American Security Commission referred to in paragraph 24 above. General MacKenzie has further advised me that ONUCA will be able to maintain the necessary presence in potentially sensitive areas with a strength of 130 military observers, a reduction of some 18 per cent from the present authorized strength of 158. This will be accompanied by a similar reduction in ONUCA's air wing. As regards other equipment, ONUCA's communications are already excellent; and as the group does not have a detective function, I do not believe that it is necessary to provide it with radar installations, as proposed by the Central American Security Commission.

27. The five Central American Governments were given advance information about the conclusions of the study described above and my intention to accept them. In reply, they expressed their satisfaction at my decision to recommend a further six months' extension of ONUCA's mandate. They reaffirmed their view that, in the present circumstances, it was very important to strengthen ONUCA's observation and verification operations in the frontier areas, taking

into account ONUCA's deployment during the current mandate period. They felt that a reduction in ONUCA's strength on the lines proposed would have an adverse effect on its ability to carry out its mandate in full. However, they reaffirmed their readiness to strengthen liaison and communication between ONUCA and their national security authorities, each within its own sphere of responsibility. They expressed their readiness to examine, with the Secretariat, developments in the region in order to reach agreement on any change that might be justified in ONUCA's method of operations.

28. At its meeting on 23 and 24 November 1990, the Central American Security Commission also adopted a number of recommendations which, if implemented, would imply a change in ONUCA's mandate. Specifically, the Commission called for assistance from the United Nations and the Organization of American States (OAS) in the disarming of civilians, the lifting of mines and the verification of arms inventories, the latter being foreseen as an initial step towards an agreed reduction of armed forces in Central America. I have informed the five Governments that, subject to the approval of the Security Council, the United Nations stands ready to provide the assistance requested, within the limits of its means and capabilities. The five Governments have welcomed this response. Unfortunately, the continuation of armed confrontation in some parts of the region makes it difficult to tackle these important issues on a regional level at the present time, although some of the countries have made progress on an individual basis in the disarming of civilians and in reducing the size of their armed forces. In the event of a specific request from the five Central American countries for any new tasks to be added to ONUCA's existing mandate, I shall of course make recommendations as appropriate to the Security Council.

29. I have given careful consideration to the views of the five Central American Governments, which are summarized in paragraph 27 above. I understand their wish to maintain ONUCA's strength at its current level. At the same time, the Chief Military Observer a.i. has recommended that ONUCA's tasks can be carried out satisfactorily with a somewhat reduced strength; and the Security Council, in its most recent resolution on the subject, has drawn attention to the need to continue to monitor expenditures carefully during this period of increasing demands on peace-keeping resources. In these circumstances I consider it right to recommend a modest reduction in ONUCA's strength. But the five Central American Governments have been assured that I will not hesitate to recommend the Security Council to restore the strength to its present level, or even to increase it, if it becomes clear that full implementation of ONUCA's mandate requires it.

30. I accordingly recommend to the Security Council that ONUCA should be extended for an additional period of six months, that is until 7 November 1991; that its mandate should continue to be the one approved by the Security Council in its resolution 644 (1989) of 7 November 1989; and that its strength should be reduced to 130 military observers.

31. In conclusion, I wish to pay tribute to the Chief Military Observer of ONUCA, Major-General Agustín Quesada Gómez, who remained in command of the group until 20 December 1990, and to the Chief Military Observer a.i., Brigadier-General Lewis MacKenzie, who has commanded the group with distinction since General Quesada's departure. Equally I pay tribute to all the men and women of ONUCA, both military and civilian, for the manner in which they have carried out their duties during the mandate period that is about to end. Their performance has reflected great credit on themselves, on their countries and on the United Nations.

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APRIL 1991